

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 SAB-01 SAM-01 SAJ-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 NIC-01 ACDA-05

OMB-01 /086 W

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R 161324Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2395

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AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMCONSOL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 167

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

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GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

KUWAIT PASS DOHA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, SA

SUBJ: KING FAISAL VISITS SYRIA

1. SUMMARY: KING FAISAL'S VISIT TO SYRIA IS IN FULL SWING AND FROM ALL INDICATIONS IS GOING WELL. CITY DECKED IN THOUSANDS OF FLAGS, BRIGHT LIGHTS, AND SLOGAN POSTERS EXTOLLING VIRTUES OF ARAB UNITY. SARG EMPHSIZING TRADITIONAL VALUES AND HAS MADE CONSPICUOUS EFFORT TO ELIMINATE ALL REFERENCES TO BAATH PARTY AND BAATHI IDEOLOGY. COMMUNIST RESIDENT DIPLOMATIC CORPS HAS TURNED OUT EN MASSE INCLUDING SOVIET AMBASSADOR, DEAN OF CORPS, WHO GREETED KING FAISAL, NO DOUBT TO HIS CHAGRIN, AT ARRIVAL CEREMONIES. COMMUNIST MINISTERS IN GOVERNMENT NOTICEABLY ABSENT FROM OFFICIAL FUNCTIONS. END SUMMARY

2. VISIT OF KING FAISAL TO SYRIA IS IN FULL SWING. SARG DECKED CITY IN THOUSANDS OF SYRIAN AND SAUDI FLAGS AS WELL AS LIGHTS ON MAIN THOROUGHFARES AND BUILDINGS. THERE WAS THAT SAME FEVERISH ACTIVITY WE NOTICED BEFORE NIXON'S ARRIVAL TO PUT STREETS, PARKS, AND FACILITIES IN BEST CONDITION POSSIBLE. SARG EFFORTS THIS TIME EXCEEDED THOSE FOR NIXON VISIT OR THOSE FOR ANY OTHER CHIEF OF STATE WHICH WE HAVE OBSERVED IN PAST YEAR. CITY ALSO COVERED IN BANNERS WITH GREETINGS TO SAUDI MONARCH. THEMES ARE TRADITIONAL ONES EXTOLLING ARAB BROTHERHOOD AND SOLIDARITY IN FACE OF THREATS BY ISRAEL AND AGAINST ARAB OIL INSTALLATIONS. WE PARTICULARLY STRUCK BY ABSENCE OF ANY SLOGANS REMOTELY ASSOCIATED WITH BAATHI IDEOLOGY.

3. LARGE CROWD TURNED OUT FOR ARRIVAL CEREMONY, JANUARY 14, AND ALONG ROUTE OF MOTORCADE THROUGH CITY. FAISAL APPEARED WELL AND ALERT WITH NO INDICATION, AS WAS REPORTED FROM RABAT IN NOVEMBER, THAT KING NEEDED ASSISTANCE IN WALKING. ONE CURIOUS EVENT WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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DECISION BY SOVIET AMBASSADOR, WHO IS DEAN OF DIPLOMATIC CORPS, TO BE PRESENT AT AIRPORT. FAISAL MUST HAVE SWALLOWED HARD TO ACCEPT HIS GREETING AND THAT OF OTHER COMMUNIST AMBASSADORS. ALL OF THEM ALSO ATTENDED STATE BANQUET SAME EVENING. WE HAVE REPORTS THAT NO TOP BAATH PARTY NOR CPS OFFICIALS WERE INCLUDED IN AIRPORT CEREMONIES OR STATE BANQUET. ASAD UNQUESTIONABLY PLAYING DOWN PARTY ROLE IN COUNTRY ON THIS

OCCASION BECAUSE OF FAISAL'S STRONG FEELING ABOUT BAATHIS.

4. KING HAS HELD TWO PRIVATE SESSIONS WITH PRESIDENT ASAD EVENINGS OF JANUARY 14 AND 15. DETAILS OF DISCUSSIONS NOT YET ANNOUNCED. KING ALSO VISITED KUNEITRA (JANUARY 15) AND UNIDENTIFIED FRONT-LINE POSITION. JANUARY 16, HE WILL BE GUEST OF SAUDI MILITARY AT NEARBY AIR BASE AND WILL HOST DINNER FOR PRESIDENT ASAD IN EVENING.

5. COMMENT: MOST SIGNIFICANT FACT ABOUT VISIT IS THAT IT TAKING PLACE. WHOLE GENERATION OF SYRIANS HAS GROWN UP ON DIET OF HATRED FOR REACTIONARY ARAB REGIMES WITH FAISAL'S KINGDOM HELD UP AS PRIME EXAMPLE. YET CROWDS HAVE POURED OUT TO GIVE MONARCH ROUSING AND, UNEXPECTEDLY, SPONTANEOUS WELCOME. DIRECTOR GENERAL OF SYRIAN TV DESCRIBED IT WELL TO EMBOFF, SAYING, "FOR PAST FOUR YEARS WE HAVE CONSCIOUSLY EASED UP ON PROPAGANDA ATTACKS AGAINST OTHER ARAB LEADERS TO IMPROVE OUR IMAGE. FAISAL'S VISIT IS PROOF OF OUR SUCCESS." GIVEN KING'S LONG STANDING DISTASTE FOR BAATH, HIS VISIT MUST SIGNAL HIS BELIEF THAT CURRENT SYRIAN REGIME SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER THAN ITS PREDECESSORS. FINALLY, WE FIND REMARKABLE THE WILLINGNESS OF SYRIAN GOVERNMENT OF BAATHI PERSUASION TO SO TOTALLY DOWNPLAY BAATH PARTY AND ITS IDEOLOGY.  
MURPHY

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